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TAGS: [ECON](#) [SOC](#) [UNDP](#) [UNGA](#) [EU](#) [IT](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY ON BOARD WITH U.S. SAFE DRIVING EFFORTS:  
RESPONSE TO DEMARCHE ON DISTRACTED DRIVING

REF: STATE 6703

¶1. (U) EconOff delivered the Safe Driving demarche on January 19 to Ambassador Gabriele Sardo, diplomatic advisor to Minister of Transportation Altero Matteoli. Sardo was very enthusiastic in his response. He said that safe driving initiatives are a pet project of Minister Matteoli and that Italy is interested in partnership with the U.S. in this effort. He said that Italy is particularly interested in moving the safe driving conversation beyond industrialized societies and working to build awareness among developing countries with rural populations who may not fully understand the dangers presented by distracted drivers. Though Italy is enthusiastic and has several initiatives aimed to decrease traffic accidents and mortalities there has not been any effort so far to specifically target distracted driving.

¶2. (U) Per Sardo's suggestion, EconOff had a follow-up meeting with Sergio Dandolini, director general of road security and safety, and Viviana Bianco, coordinator of international affairs, to obtain more detailed information on questions contained in the demarche. Responses follow:

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EXISTING LAWS ON TEXTING/CELL PHONE USE WHILE DRIVING  
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¶3. (U) Since 2003 Italian law has prohibited the use of a cell phone while driving except by use of hands free technology. Violation results in a five-point reduction in driver's license points. Twenty points are required to maintain a license. Italian law does not specifically address texting, though it could be viewed as being prohibited as it involves hands-on use of a cell phone and as there are other Italian driving regulations that require that both hands remain on the wheel. Both Dandolini and Bianco admitted, however, that the both-hands-on-wheel law is difficult to enforce.

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DATA ON DISTRACTED DRIVING CRASHES, INJURIES, FATALITIES  
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¶4. (U) Currently there is no specific data regarding distracted driving. Italy participated in an EU-led program to reduce traffic fatalities by 50% from 2001 to 2010. This effort did not target distracted driving, but focused on issues of speed and on not driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. From 2001 to 2008, Italy saw a 33% reduction in traffic mortalities, from about 8000 deaths in 2001 to about 4700 in 2008. Dandolini said this is better than the EU average reduction of 27%. Preliminary data from 2009 show a 14.8% reduction in traffic mortalities from 2008. Additional data focusing on regional accident rates will be available in about 8 months.

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PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS  
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15. (U) Italy has not had any campaigns targeted at texting or cell phone use, but has focused a campaign on safe driving in general. "Sulla Buona Strada" (On the Good Road) focused on speed and not driving under the influence and highlighted increased penalties for driving infractions. The public awareness campaign paid close attention to education of adolescents and used testimonials from athletes and other public figures. Italy also performs regular sobriety checks on the road -- about 2 million from 2007 to 2009. Dandolini said regular checks helped demonstrate that laws are being enforced and keeps drivers in line.

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ADDITIONAL RESPONSES, SAFE DRIVING INITIATIVES  
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16. (U) According to Dandolini, other than what was outlined regarding mortalities, there is no available data regarding effectiveness of laws to reduce distracted driving because distracted driving has not been specifically targeted. Dandolini also said he was unable to provide data regarding the prevalence of text messaging or cell phone use. Post is working to obtain general cell phone and text messaging statistics from the appropriate GOI office.

17. (U) Dandolini also said Minister Matteoli had submitted a proposal to the EU to require the placement of a "black box" in motor vehicles similar to the data recorder in airplanes.

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He believes data gathered from such a recorder would help in analysis of accidents and could lead to more effective measure to reduce traffic accidents and fatalities. In addition, Dandolini said, the knowledge that a "black box" was recording their speed and actions while driving, would have the psychological effect of making drivers drive more prudently. Finally, GPS on such data recorders could also help rescue services locate an accident.  
THORNE